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ABSTRACT

A plan for individualizing instruction in large or small secondary reading classes is presented. The need for adapting reading instruction to individual student differences is discussed with emphasis upon a complete and thorough diagnosis of each student's individual needs. Techniques are outlined for measuring, interpreting, and recording individual differences in intelligence, mode of learning, cognitive style, personality, motivation, interest, cultural and educational background, and reading skills. Success of this program is dependent upon each student's understanding of his own particular reading problem and realizing that something can be done. Specific materials must be available for the student that apply to the remediation of his problem and at his grade level. They should be self-administrating, autoinstructional, and multilevel. In addition, the student must have continuous knowledge of his progress, made possible by a system for daily and quarterly recordkeeping. References are included. (CL)

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"Development of Secondary Reading Programs"

A major educational problem which remains largely unsolved is the adjustment of materials and methods to meet individual differences. It is a well established fact that by the time students reach the secondary level an extremely wide range of reading abilities may be present in any given classroom. This situation presents an almost insurmountable instructional task to the teacher.

It would be ideal if all students could receive continuous instruction in the reading skills needed for each subject and grade level.

In actual practice the present trend in many secondary schools is to place below-average readers in special reading classes for remedial instruction in reading (5). A teacher, usually from the English department and with little or no training in reading instruction, is charged with the responsibility of bringing these students up to grade level. Through a combination of administrative vision, teacher perseverance, and Federal funds, many fine reading programs have developed from such unpromising beginnings.

Need For Individualized Instruction

This paper is concerned primarily with the instructional methods employed in such special reading classes. From the results of a questionnaire survey of over 300 secondary reading programs (5), from personal observation of many secondary schools, and from a study of the literature, it is evident that most reading teachers cover the same material with all students.

Using this approach, many students will be required to repeat the practice of reading skills with which they are already familiar. This results in duplicated effort, wasted time and energy, and fails to improve the reading skills in which each particular student is actually deficient.

Even with large classes, inadequate space and materials, limited funds, and little or no training, it is this writer's contention that much can and should be done to individualize reading instruction in special reading classes at the secondary level.

Changes In Teacher Attitude

One of the basic changes which must first take place is in the attitude of the reading teacher. The teacher must really face the fact that every student has a different set of problems and that each of these problems needs a different solution. This idea is very difficult to get across to the average secondary teacher who has been trained to use one textbook with the whole class or give one lecture to the whole group. It has been traditionally held that there is a certain body of knowledge which every student is supposed to master. This philosophy tends to carry over into the reading classroom.

As a matter of fact, the act of reading is extremely complex and the treatment of reading disabilities simply does not lend itself to the whole-group approach. Many skills are involved in reading and a deficit in any of these skills may influence the reading process adversely (4). It is this failure to completely understand the complexity of the reading process that in turn results in an over-simplification of reading programs, whether remedial, corrective, or developmental.

A Suggested Program For Individualized Instruction

The following program is suggested as a beginning towards complete individualization of reading instruction. It is based upon the actual experiences of the writer in a fairly typical secondary situation.

Diagnosis of Individual Needs

Instruction in reading should be based upon a diagnosis of each

student's individual needs and abilities. This should be as thorough and complete as possible. The justification for diagnosis of individual reading problems is to estimate the difficulty and then to determine how to proceed in correcting the difficulty (8). While recognizing that the average reading teacher is not a clinician, a careful diagnosis points toward an effective solution of the problem. Procedures will vary from informal observations to a carefully planned and detailed case study, according to the training and experience of the staff member.

The diagnosis of reading problems usually involves the administration of several tests. The reading teacher must carefully avoid the threat which is present in almost all testing situations. An atmosphere of genuine acceptance and interest in helping with individual problems must be maintained. Secondary students who have had repeated failures all through the grades often react negatively to all tests and may not even try to answer the questions. In situations like this it may be wise to spend several days or even weeks getting better acquainted and breaking down barriers to the subject of reading.

There are many reasons for giving tests. The main reason is to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses so an effective instructional plan can be developed. It must be pointed out, however, that many important objectives of the reading teacher will not be measured on any reading test. These include broadening interests in reading, improving student attitudes toward reading, and applying study skills. (3)

Group Testing

When dealing with classes of over fifteen students, the reading

teacher is forced to rely primarily upon group tests. The test selected should be appropriate to the age level being tested and produce valid scores at least in the areas of reading rate, vocabulary, and comprehension. (9) In many school districts these scores are available as part of the regular district testing program. The administration of individual reading tests may be necessary later for determining more specific reading disabilities.

Interpretation of Test Scores

It is extremely important to consider test scores diagnostically and not as objective measures of achievement for giving out grades. It is likewise important that students know their test scores, not in terms of comparisons with other members of the class, but as indications of individual strengths and weaknesses, all of which can and will be improved.

The diagnostic interpretation of reading test scores involves a careful study of their inter-relationships. For instance, on a timed test, a low reading rate may interfere with obtaining a true picture of vocabulary and comprehension scores. Likewise, a reading rate that is too fast may also lower vocabulary or comprehension scores because of careless errors of superficial reading. Low vocabulary scores may be an indication of limited verbal ability or poor word attack skills. Many other test score patterns have been outlined in a publication by the Committee on Diagnostic Reading Tests (2).

Also, much can be learned by examining individual responses to the test items. A careful matching of questions and answers can often

reveal a great deal of diagnostic information. The manual accompanying most standardized reading tests will give recommendations on the use of scores and possible classroom applications.

Recording Test Scores

After some remediation has taken place, another form of the same test may be given in order to determine the amount of improvement which has taken place in each of the reading skills. It is helpful to prepare a form for recording these scores in order that the student and the teacher may have a continuous record of progress. This form should have several large bar graphs. The scores from each sub-test are recorded by the student on his own page of bar graphs. The student keeps this in his own reading folder and thus has a continuous record of the specific reading skills in which he needs to improve.

At the bottom of each bar graph space should be left for comments and recommendations. After the test scores are recorded on the graphs, the teacher should go over the scores with each student pointing out individual strengths and weaknesses. At this time, also, it would be appropriate to write down, in the space below the bar graphs, specific recommendations for future reading improvement activities for each student. When additional test scores are obtained, this procedure may be repeated, with new gains pointed out and revisions made in each student's program of reading instruction as necessary.

Essential keys to a successful individualized reading program include the understanding of one's own problem, the application of

specific materials and procedures to solve that problem, and then continuous knowledge of one's progress.

Other Factors Involved in Reading Progress

The effective reading teacher must also be alert to other factors which will assist in the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties. Information concerning vision, hearing, speech, general health, emotional disturbances, brain damage, environmental factors, language differences, and inappropriate educational practices must be gathered from various sources such as school records, counselors, nurses, other teachers and parents. It is not the purpose of this paper to pursue the effect of the aforementioned factors upon reading progress. In summary, all the data on teaching reading reveal that they are all extremely important. For instance, without both good vision and hearing, satisfactory progress in reading is most unlikely (10).

The exact relationship between intelligence and reading achievement is not clear. Positive correlations have almost always been found between intelligence test scores and reading ability. However, judging a student to be incapable of improving in reading because his score on a particular intelligence test is low tends to create a self-fulfilling prophecy (7). If an intelligence test is going to be used in deciding which students to help, it should be the best available. It should be interpreted with a due regard for possible errors of measurement and changes in rate of mental growth.

Some attention should be given to the selection and application of different modes of learning. If a student appears to learn better

by one modality than another, instruction should usually emphasize the introduction of new material through the stronger modality (7). Mode may be cultural and experiential. The culturally different child is probably oriented toward physical and visual learning rather than aural. By determining the individual student's specific abilities and utilizing them in an organized way, reading can be acquired efficiently.

Grouping for Instruction

A careful diagnosis of individual strengths and weaknesses in reading should result in a different program of remediation for each student. One approach which has become rather common is to form small groups of students for drill or practice on similar skills. On the surface, this might appear to be a practical and efficient method of meeting individual differences. The main disadvantage of this practice is that it reinforces the poor self concept which has already been well established in most retarded readers. Students quickly recognize the fact that they are being labeled and grouped in the same old way. Those in the slower groups will tend to adopt a negative attitude toward the whole reading process and engage in subtle forms of rebellion which will inhibit progress in reading.

Students differ in particular skills. A group treatment which assumes that each student needs to work on the same skill at the same level ignores this important truth (6). If students are different, they need different treatment. Modern self-instructional materials and techniques make individual instruction possible. An individual approach using differentiated assignments is both desirable and possible.

Record Keeping

Individualized instruction depends a great deal upon self-motivation of the learner. Included under this concept is the idea that motivation results from the students' awareness that growth is taking place. This is based partially upon the practice of having students maintain records of daily progress. Day to day encouragement of the reading teacher is very important. Reading becomes self-directed when the reader discovers that reading makes a contribution to him personally.

Quarterly Record-Keeping

For a reading course based upon the school year, the following forms are suggested. Divide a sheet of notebook paper into four equal quarters, one for each quarter of the school year. Each quarter should be further sub-divided into five equal horizontal sections. Label each of these sections according to the five days of the week. During the first quarter of the school year, the reading teacher, together with the individual student, outlines an individual daily reading improvement program for that quarter. This individual program is based upon the results of the diagnostic tests which were placed on the bar graphs described earlier in this paper.

For example, one student might be a very slow reader yet have good vocabulary and comprehension. This student would be scheduled to spend time on timed readings, pacers, or other materials which deal primarily with rate improvement. He might read certain sections of manuals or workbooks which explain the improvement of rate. Appropriate materials

and activities would be assigned for each day of the week. This schedule would be entered on that student's master program for that quarter.

Another student might be deficient in general word attack skills. He would be scheduled to spend his time in certain chapters of workbooks, kits, or teacher-prepared materials dealing with his specific problem.

For each student, a permanent daily schedule would be worked out for the entire school quarter. Every day, on coming to class, each student looks at this form in his folder as a reminder of his schedule for that particular day. Adjustments can be made in each student's program if need be. Near the end of each school quarter, the teacher, in conference with the student, reviews his progress and sets up a new schedule for the next quarter, as needed.

Under this individualized plan, each student sees what he is doing and why. He actually has a part in planning his own program. Since each student has a different program, the pressure of unfair and unequal competition is removed. Each student competes against himself and not some arbitrary and unrealistic standard. Students are graded on the basis of individual effort and progress.

Daily Record-Keeping

Another simple form is helpful for keeping a daily record of what each student is doing. This form is similar in format to the quarter schedule. The notebook paper is divided into four equal quarters and each fourth is further sub-divided into five equal horizontal sections, just as before. The five sections in each quarter are labeled vertically according to the five days of the week. In each horizontal

section the student records briefly, using abbreviations, what he has worked on or accomplished in class each day of the week. This form is filled out at the end of the period each day just before the student folders are collected. Each page of this form lasts four weeks. The teacher may collect these daily records as often as necessary to review student progress and achievement. Each student has a daily record of his own accomplishments in addition to his permanent quarterly schedule which guides him from day to day in his work.

This record-keeping is not burdensome and it works. It has great flexibility in that a student's schedule may be changed at any time. Each student keeps all of his own records. The teacher is free to move around the room helping individuals where needed and observing student progress. Using this method, the teacher has far more time to work with individuals and each student is working toward goals he has helped set and works at his own rate.

The success of this plan is predicated on several vital assumptions. First, each student must see and understand his own particular reading problem and realize that something can be done about it. Secondly, specific materials must be available for the student to apply to the remediation of his problem. These materials must be at his level. Third, the student must have continuous knowledge of his progress. In addition to the simple forms described above, practically every reading program prepared commercially has its own charts and graphs for showing progress.

Materials

As for the materials, we have never been better equipped to handle

differentiated classroom instruction. Materials have been developed that are multilevel, self-administrating, and auto-instructional. The use of these kinds of materials gives the teacher the freedom and flexibility necessary to provide directed experience to specific individuals. (1)

Conclusion

This paper has presented a plan for the complete individualization of instruction in secondary school reading classes. Students should not spend weeks or months on materials which are not suited to their own reading problems. Thus, careful diagnosis is an integral part of this plan. Differentiated assignments are then made according to student needs. Teachers and students are kept continuously aware of individual progress through a system of daily record-keeping.

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